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Justice Pigott accepts Jaeckle Award at gala NYC luncheon



Left to right: Hon. Jonathan Lippman, Hon. Eugene F. Pigott Jr. '73, Dean Makau W. Mutua and Francis M. Letro '79

Forty years to the day after he was admitted to the New York State bar, one of SUNY Buffalo Law School's most distinguished jurists accepted the school's highest honor.

Hon. Eugene F. Pigott Jr. '73, senior associate justice on the state Court of Appeals, was presented the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award at a New York City alumni luncheon on Jan. 31. The award, given annually "to an individual who has distinguished himself or herself and has made significant contributions to the Law School and the legal profession," made special note of the justice's commitment to the advancement of minority attorneys.

Pigott, a native of Rochester, graduated from LeMoyne College in 1968 and then served as an Army captain in Vietnam until 1970. After graduating from the Law School, he practiced with the Buffalo firm Offermann, Fallon, Mahoney & Adner, served as Erie County attorney, then became chief trial counsel for Offermann, Cassano, Pigott & Greco. He was appointed to the state Supreme Court in 1997, elected to a full 14-year term, then was designated to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, and appointed presiding justice in 2000. His nomination to the Court of Appeals, New York's highest court, was confirmed by the State Senate in 2006.

At the luncheon, following welcoming remarks by master of ceremonies Thomas E. Black Jr. '79 and Law Alumni Association President Terrence M.

Gilbride '88, the honoree's boss – New York State's chief justice, Jonathan Lippman – paid tribute to Pigott's role on the high court.

"Gene really epitomizes what the Court of Appeals is all about," Lippman said. "There isn't a case that comes up that he doesn't put his unique stamp on it. We all look to Gene for his practical take on what the case means in the real world and for real people. It's so helpful to have someone who has such a practical understanding of the law."

Dean Makau W. Mutua reported to the attendees that the Law School is "in good health," pointing to progress in faculty hiring, building renovations and the academic quality of the student body. Noting that applications to law schools nationwide have dropped by half, the dean said legal education will almost certainly undergo changes. He announced that the University has given its assent to reducing the Law School's enrollment to 600, down from the current 750. The dean also shared the happy news that the Campaign for SUNY Buffalo Law School has raised more than \$22 million toward its \$30 million goal.

In introducing the honoree, Francis M. Letro '79 pointed to Pigott's human qualities, saying, "He enjoys an extraordinary legal career well balanced by his family, by his friends, and by having lots of fun along the way as a lawyer and a judge."

Especially, Letro said, Pigott has worked tirelessly "for the benefit of the profession and its day-to-day practitioners. While his job is to be the last word on the Court of Appeals when it comes to application of the law to the specific facts of a case, he also sees his job

as being the first word when it comes to advising and counseling lawyers on how to build a successful and fulfilling and helpful legal career. He frequently reminds us to take seriously our obligations to our clients and to the court, but not to take ourselves too seriously. Most of all, he reminds us to balance our professional obligations with the needs of one's family and oneself.

"He's a regular attendee and participant at legal events big and small. He'll be seen at retirement parties, bench and

lawyers and the law, and "possesses a wonderful humanity. He gets the fact that the law is about people." He also praised Pigott's service to the Law School as a guest lecturer and mentor and as a longtime member of the Dean's Advisory Council.

In accepting the Jaeckle Award, Pigott noted how difficult the job of attorney can be. "If doctors were like lawyers, that would mean if they're there to take out your appendix, there's a doctor on the other side of the table trying to keep

it in," he said. "It's a tough business, and the fact that we can keep our civility and our fraternity is amazing. What we do for people is incredible.

"I have such great regard for what you do and how you do it," he said to the lawyers in the audience. "My theme over the last five or six years in CLEs is, you've got to take care of yourself. It's like a sport. You have to be physically ready; you have to feel good when you're

doing this work, otherwise you just start to drag. You are in a profession that is unparalleled on earth, that does things no one else can do, that solves problems in the best way they can possibly be solved."



Hon. Eugene F. Pigott Jr. '73

bar picnics and social gatherings and memorial services, Law School moot court competitions, Law School Commencement exercises and many other events. He is uncommon for his common touch and his common sense, and for that we are very grateful."

"The judge embodies everything that one could hope for in a jurist," Dean Mutua commented in his remarks. "He's intelligent, he's fair, and he's dedicated to the law. But he's also fiercely dedicated to our Law School."

Mutua noted that Pigott loves

Looking north and finding a world of success in business

As **Victor Pérez Urbán** looked to a future in international business, he knew that an additional U.S. law degree would be a key qualification. After much research, he found himself in a New York state of mind.

A law graduate of Universidad Panamericana, Urbán was director of procedures for the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit in Mexico's Office of the General Tax Attorney.

"I had decided to move from public service to private practice," Urbán says. "I was looking for a master's degree in law in the U.S. I evaluated different options, focusing especially in New York State, because to pursue a career in corporate law it was necessary to learn New York law. New York law is very useful for a foreign lawyer, because it's so important in international transactions. It's a body of law that is used in contracts all over the world." Urbán now serves as senior legal counsel for a business that works in more than 50 countries worldwide.

In his new position, Urbán still oversees the company's tax work. But his main focus is in transactional law. He negotiates and oversees contracts for the sourcing of materials and services, including involvement in the competitive bidding process; manages contracts with the company's information technology suppliers; and ensures that data privacy is being respected.

Urbán says he and his family still have fond memories of their time in Buffalo, and he is working with Law School staff to spread the word about the opportunities available at SUNY Buffalo Law School for lawyers and would-be lawyers in other countries.



Urbán notes the Buffalo program grounds students in the U.S. common law system, a valuable addition to the civil law training in Mexico and many other countries.